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Talking Points for the DCI

23 April 1986

Syria-Libya: Cooperation Following US Airstrikes

Syria has offered Tripoli military assistance following the US attack, but its diplomatic efforts on Libya's behalf have been minimal. There are no indications that the attack has disrupted normal US diplomatic relations with the Syrian regime, nor have the Syrians been prepared to actively back Libyan demands that an Arab Summit be convened to address the US action.

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25X1Expanded Military Assistance

Since the US airstrikes against Libya, Damascus has quietly provided military assistance, but little diplomatic support, to Tripoli. Syria's recent commitment of technically-skilled personnel to Libya suggests closer solidarity between the two countries than previously existed.

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Syria is the only Arab state providing active support for Tripoli and reportedly has sent an undetermined number of fighter pilots and air defense technicians in recent weeks.

- The Syrian military probably could ill-afford losing skilled personnel at this time: it has been on heightened alert since late March, probably fearing an Israeli attack, but also possibly due to uncertainty about US retaliatory actions in the event Damascus was linked with terrorist incidents.

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Syria's donation of valuable, trained personnel underscores its concern about the failure of Libyan air defense systems-- which are similar to Syria's--to counter US airstrikes. Damascus is particularly concerned that Israel may obtain sensitive information from the United States on the systems' capabilities.

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Whatever their numbers, we believe Syrian pilots and technicians in Libya will take a more active role in training Libyans and may become directly involved in any future clashes with US forces.

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Terrorism

We do not have conclusive evidence of terrorist cooperation between Syria and Libya

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Syria is a major practitioner and patron of terrorism

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Syrian President Assad is on record vowing retaliation for Israel's interception of a Libyan jet on 4 February which was carrying Syrian Ba'th Party officials.

-- At the time Assad indicated Syrian revenge would not be directed at civilian targets which, he said, would make Syrians no better than the Israelis whom he accused of air piracy and international terrorism.

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Syria uses terrorism to maintain Syrian dominance in Lebanon, thwart movement toward peace negotiations between moderate Arabs and Israel, extract financial support from certain Arab states in the form of "protection money," and eliminate Syrian dissidents.

-- Syria has never been directly implicated in acts of gratuitous violence against non-Arab civilians in Europe.

-- Syrian complicity in the El Al bombing would suggest a shift in its guidelines for the use of terrorism or that its extensive security apparatus is running amok.

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